

IV.

CAPTURE OF THOMAS WILSON.

About 1750 John Wilson and Bowyer Miller located on Jacksons River, in what is now Highland County, Va. Mr Wilson settled at the mouth of Peak or Stony Run, while Miller located at Wilsonville, farther up. During Braddock's war Mr Miller refugeed to Tinkling Spring, and finally across the Blue Ridge, leaving land, house, and property uncared for.

About 1756 Mr Wilson refugeed near Greenville, taking his movable property with him, but finding it impossible to get subsistence, sent his horses and cattle back and employed some one to do the raunging and salting. We hear nothing more of him. In a year or two his family ventured to return and took up their abode on the east bank of the river, some two hundred yards perhaps below the crossing leading to the Bolar Spring. The Indians then raided their home about the year 1760.

This John Wilson, the pioneer, was the grandfather of the the late William Wilson, whose daughters Charlotte and Susan married Adam and Washington Stephenson, citizens of Highland County.

The morning of the raid John Wilson, one of the sons, had gone to Fort Lewis on the Cowpasture to invite hands to assist in raising the house recently occupied by Mrs Washington Stephenson. In the meanwhile Mrs Wilson and her daughters Barbara and Susan were very busy in preparations for the raising, and were cooking and washing on the east bank of the river near the cabin. Thomas Wilson, a younger son, was at the mill grinding the needed corn meal. The mill stood near the crossing of the Warm Run leading to the residence of the late David Stephenson.

Upon John's return late in the evening as he came in sight of home he was fired upon by Indians. One ball passed under his arm pit and tore the fringe off his hunting shirt. Mounted on a fleet horse he turned instantly to return to the fort whence he had just come and was soon out of sight of the Indians. While going at full speed through the gap a limb knocked his hat off. He stopped and picked it up at the peril of his life. This person was the father of the William Wilson already mentioned, and of the late Mrs Esther Bolar near the Warm Springs.

Upon reaching the fort he told what had happened and begged for assistance at once. None were willing to venture that night. The captain then ordered a draft for a detachment. It was very late in the night before the detail reached the summit of Jack Mountain overlooking the valley. It was dark, no light save that of the summer stars, and in the valley this light was obscured by a dense fog. With sad forebodings they began the descent into the darkness of the ravine

beneath, through which they were to grope their way, and where their young guide had been fired on and pursued by the wily enemy. They cautiously moved down the mountain, quietly passed through the gap—all on foot except their guide John Wilson. At the gap he dismounted, hung up his saddle and bridle, and turned the jaded horse out to graze in the woods. He also advised his friends to leave the path, cross the Warm Run, and pass down the right bank by a circuitous way to the mill to see whether it was running or not. "If it be running," says John Wilson, "it is a bad sign, for then I know the Indians have surprised Brother Tom and killed him, because they would not know how to stop the mill. But if it is not running there is some hope, for he may have seen the Indians, stopped the mill and made his escape, for I know no Indian can catch him by running."

The mill was found to be silent. Young Wilson entered it quietly and found everything in place, and the newly ground sack of meal was at the chest, securely tied. Taking hope from this, the rescuing party crossed the river just above the mouth of the Warm Run, and passed over the bottom to the knoll on which the church stands, and thence moved with the greatest caution in the direction of the dwelling on the opposite side of the river.

Upon reaching the camp just opposite the cabin, John Wilson advised the men to remain there until he could wade over and find out what had happened. If all was well he could call them over, but if the cabin had been destroyed or occupied by the Indians he

would return and determine on what would be best to do. When he approached the dwelling he found the doors heavily barricaded, but through a well known crevice he discovered the family was yet there. Thereupon he gave the signal, and his friends hastened over in all the transports of exulting joy, so great was their relief from the long and powerful suspense they had been in for so many hours.

The mother and her daughter Barbara had been wounded by the clubs or tomahawks of the Indians, but not fatally injured, Susan had escaped unhurt. It was found that none but Tom Wilson was missing. The last thing known of him he was at the mill. Upon going to the mill early in the morning, the party found his track, and that he had been running. This they followed until they found where Tom had stepped on a stick, had fallen, been overtaken and captured. The Indians were trailed from that point across the river to the bluff near the residence of the late Michael Wise. Thence they went southwest to a point about a mile below where the church now stands. There they remained some time, as the signs indicated. From that point they were traced back to Peak's Run, up which they went.

Tom's sister Susan took the lead in all this search for Tom. She was well nigh frantic with grief. At frequent times she would cry out as she went in advance of the party by fifteen or twenty yards: "Here are my poor brother's tracks."

Upon reaching the top of Back Creek Mountain, it was thought best to go no further, as fourteen men

could do nothing with so many savages as the signs indicated. It was with great difficulty that Susan could be prevailed on to return. For years nothing was heard of Tom. He died of fever soon after his capture. We hear nothing of John Wilson, the father, as he does not appear to have been at home.

The writer is indebted to the late John Cleek, Esq., for the material for this and other sketches.

Information was received concerning Tom Wilson in the following manner.

David Kincaid, who had been one of the fourteen rescuers, went with an expedition sent to treat with the Indians at Fort Pitt concerning the ransom of prisoners. A treaty was made and a day appointed for giving up all in captivity. That day passed away and no prisoners were brought in as agreed. It looked suspicious, and that night every precaution against surprise was taken, lest the Indians should prove hostile and treacherous, but nothing occurred as feared.

The next day was nearly spent, when late in the evening a little girl ten years of age was brought in. She could speak nothing but Indian dialect, and could tell nothing about herself. Mr Kincaid's wife and three children had been taken prisoners about the time Tom Wilson was taken. He remembered one of the children had lost a thumb. Upon examination it was found as he had stated, and the recognition of father and child was of the most touching character. The next evening Mrs Kincaid was brought in, whereupon

husband, wife, and the only surviving child were reunited.

Mrs Kincaid could tell all about that which had happened to Tom Wilson. He had just finished his task at the mill, and was on the way to the house, when he discovered the Indians, who were coming down the east bank of the river. Wishing to take him alive they headed him off, and he took up the river and was caught. They wished also not to alarm the women at work near the dwelling, nor the men at work on the west bank near where the new house was to be reared, getting in the logs and hewing them.

Tom and the other prisoners were taken to a place some distance away. They were securely bound and left in the charge of an old Indian, while the rest should return and capture the parties already referred to. In this they failed, and all escaped to the house, though some were slightly wounded by the tomahawks thrown at them. The doors were barricaded, and the Indians repulsed without taking any captives.

John Wilson having made his escape on horseback, the Indians supposed he would soon return with men from the fort, and so they did not press the siege, but started immediately for their towns and were miles away ere John returned.

Thomas did not survive his captivity very long.

John Wilson said he had great difficulty in persuading the family to give up the house raising and go to the fort until it was certain all danger for the time being was over. John also reports that among the wounded, besides his mother and sister Barbara, was

an Irish weaver whose name is forgotten. At the time the attack was made he was weaving in an out house. During the melee an Indian came upon him and drew his gun. The Irishman fell forward on his face just as the trigger was pulled, the ball inflicting a wound on his hip.

When the relief party came in the night, and the question was asked "is anybody killed?" the Irishman quickly responded: "An faith, there is nobody killed but meself!"

The writer is also under obligations to Squire John Cleek for the following items:

A fight occurred between the whites and Indians at Cunningham's fields, near Harpers, head of Kerr's Creek. The Indians are reported by tradition to have carried their dead to the summit of the mountain and buried them under the stones now found near the roadside on the way from Rockbridge Alum to Lexington.

The first settlement on the Bullpasture River, in Highland, was made near the Blue Spring, known as the Lockridge farm, by the Hicklins and Estills. The Grahams and Carlyles the next farms higher up the river. Pullin, a native of Ireland, settled above Carlyle. A good many of these settlers sold out and moved to Kentucky, and some of them prospered greatly in their western homes.